

Child Welfare: RUGMARK's Experience



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RUGMARK was established in 1994. It is the constructive response to the campaign of many NGOs and activists to boycott carpets from India. The campaign claimed that Indian carpets were made with illegal child labour.

To avoid a collapse of the Indian Carpet Industry and serious consequences for all people earning their livelihood from making carpets RUGMARK was started. It was then and is till today, a unique cooperation of manufacturers, exporters, importers, buyers, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral development organisations. They all wanted to achieve two major goals:

- to end illegal child labour in the whole production process;
- to keep up the carpet market and so to give employment and income to thousands of families.



RUGMARK could be established because leading German importers and buyers promised to concentrate their purchases on carpets without child labour and because Indian

manufacturers and exporter showed keen interest to offer such carpets. NGOs, especially, South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS), as well as UNICEF supported this campaign. The German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) took the initiative through its Indo-German Export Promotion Project (IGEP) to bring all the groups together and to jointly work them elaborate the business guidelines for the scheme, which was named RUGMARK.

RUGMARK acts as a certification system. It assures importers and buyers that carpets with the RUGMARK label have been manufactured and exported by a company which has committed itself to work without illegal child labour, and which is subject to an effective surveillance mechanism. The RUGMARK Foundation issues its labels to those exporters, who comply with the RUGMARK criteria and have obtained the right to use it on their carpets. The compliance of RUGMARK criteria is monitored through its inspection and monitoring system.

In pursuance of its objectives, The RUGMARK Foundation (India) also is not only a labelling system, but also runs education, vocational and rehabilitation programmes for released child workers as well as for the children of carpet weavers intended towards the prevention of child labour. In addition, the Foundation is intensively involved in marketing and export promotion activities for hand made carpets.

The Organization

In India, all the activities are managed and supervised by RUGMARK Foundation, (India) under the guidance of its Chairperson, the former Union Minister, Mrs. Maneka Gandhi and the Board of Directors. IGEP/GTZ is still supporting the scheme by offering permanent advice and supporting the work through providing of the Managing Director. The RUGMARK Foundation, (India) was incorporated in September 1994 under sec. 25 of the Indian Companies Act of 1956, as a private, voluntary, non-profit entity. The representation of diverse interest groups on the Board through highly reputed personalities lends RUGMARK the necessary credibility

RUGMARK International e.V.

Prompted with the successful launch and implementation of RUGMARK in India, a whole supporting network has been

YEARLY BREAK UP OF RUGMARK LABELS ISSUED TO RM LICENSEES

Type of Carpets	Till 31.3.96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04* Till 30 Sep 03 (6 months)	Total
Hand-tufted Carpets	96,485	89,344	134,309	154,423	190,811	233,966	261,101	271,776	180,485	1,612,700
Hand-knotted Carpets	91,134	226,792	279,497	206,216	142,605	152,805	101,358	84,173	28,958	1,313,538
Dhurries/ Rugs/ wall hangings etc	1,010	17,356	16,383	9,517	1,357	7,741	1,384	45,863	43,557	144,168
TOTAL	188,629	333,492	430,189	370,156	334,773	394,512	363,843	401,812	*253,000	3,070,406

*The column showing the figures for the year 03-04 shows the figures only for the first 6 months i.e. from April to Sep 2003.

established in many other countries. In the carpet-producing countries at present, RUGMARK organisations have also been established in Nepal and Pakistan and in the consumer countries Germany, UK and USA. The offices in the consumer countries aim at increasing public awareness, do public relations and attend to the needs of RUGMARK carpet dealers. The legal aspects of the entire RUGMARK family are managed by the umbrella organisation RUGMARK International.

RUGMARK'S Operations in India at a Glance

RUGMARK Foundation (India) in its operations since its inception in 1995 achieved considerable success. RUGMARK India has registered with it 269 licensees. Till September 2003 RUGMARK licensee exporters from India have exported more than 3 million RUGMARK labelled carpets. The RUGMARK inspection and monitoring system is successfully working as an incentive for orders and as a deterrent to use illegal child labour. It will help to further improve the image of Indian carpets.



RUGMARK through the inspection system, the schools and awareness raising activities has contributed to the decline of illegal child labour in the carpet industry. RUGMARK has further provided rehabilitation to migrant and bonded child workers, who would otherwise (most probably) have joined work in other looms or other sectors. The

The yearly break up of the Children Found during RUGMARK Inspections:

Year	Children found
1995	461
1996	453
1997	256
1998	65
1999	62
2000	36
2001	25
2002	21
TOTAL	1379

rehabilitation of children in special institutions has provided migrant child labour with an opportunity for a brighter future.

The declining trend for the child labour in carpet weaving is evident from the following figures.

The decline is mainly the result of the activities of many organisations and the strict enforcement of the existing anti-child labour legislations by Government agencies and organisations. Awareness has been created in remote areas that child labour is illegal and should not be used.

Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Activities

RUGMARK India's social welfare activities consist at present of a rehabilitation centre, six schools, providing with adult education centres, a carpet weaving training centre for women in carpet weaving and a mobile health clinic. The location and the number of the children can be seen from the following table.

RUGMARK BALASHRYA: The Rehabilitation Centre

The RUGMARK - Balashrya or the child- rehabilitation centre is located in Gopiganj in the Sant Ravi Das Nagar (Bhadohi) district of Uttar Pradesh (U. P.) It was initially exclusively geared to provide shelter to those children who have been freed from captivity for carpet weaving. These children urgently needed social and economic reintegration.

After watching the progress of the Balashrya kids and also the proper formal and vocational education provided by the rehab centre, the local people requested RUGMARK officials



REHAB/EDUCATION CENTRES		STRENGTH			MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE CENTRE
		Male	Female	TOTAL	
BALASHRYA Gopiganj, Bhadohi, U.P.	Boarders	57		57	<i>To impart vocational training, non-formal and formal education to children freed from carpet weaving</i>
	*Day Scholars	31	25	56	
Primary School Baribisa Jagapur Bhadohi U.P.		181	126	307	<i>*Needy children from the nearby areas are also admitted in Balashrya as day scholars.</i>
Primary School Barhi Newada, Varanasi U.P.		130	145	275	
Primary School Handia, Allahabad		151	101	252	Schools provide formal and non-formal education to the children removed from the looms and also to those of poor weavers
Primary School Bhagatpatti, Cherapur, Bhadohi		193	170	363	
Primary School, Vijaypur, Distt. Mirzapur		121	119	240	
Primary School, Devnathpur -Lakhamanpatti, Bhadohi		143	169	312	
TOTAL				1862	* To impart non-formal education to the adult weavers
Adult Education Centres		175	—	175	

to make it also open for nearby needy and poor children as day scholars. From the session 2002-2003, accordingly local children were also enrolled in the Balashrya as day scholars.

The Balashrya kids are given formal education, together with simple vocational training in various fields. Besides, medical attention, hobbies, and sports, provide new perspectives for a different and better life.

During the session 2002-2003 the students of Balashrya have repeated the success stories of the past years in various fields. Here only some examples, Meen Bahadur, qualified for a scholarship by qualifying Integrated Scholarship Examination. Indrajeet Saroj showed excellent performance, while playing for a Bhadohi District Team at various Inter District Cricket Tournaments. He was among the top ten out of the 300 participants in the competition for getting admission in a reputed Government Sports Hostel. Chhotu Rishi participated in state level athletic events. Mukesh won the prize for painting in a competition held in Allahabad, U.P. Manoj Roy showed excellent performance at the district level chess championship.

RUGMARK Schools

The first RUGMARK School was opened in the village Bairibisa, Jagapur, Bhadohi District of Uttar Pradesh in August 1996. Subsequently five more schools have been opened in the heart of the carpet belt for the support of child weavers. The schools benefit children of carpet weavers. And RUGMARK schools are recognised by the State Government of Uttar Pradesh. The schools and the Balashrya (rehab centre) provide the opportunity to acquire education and vocational training. They are visible symbol of the social commitment of the RUGMARK Foundation.

In all the years, the children have shown a very good performance in the examinations. In the session 2002-03 about 95 percent of the students passed their annual examination, the majority of them with good results.

In the RUGMARK schools and the Rehabilitation Centre apart from formal education, children are also provided with first knowledge for different trades as e.g. tailoring, carpentry, scooter and motor cycle repairing and also carpet weaving.

RUGMARK Adult Education Centres

In order to make parents and wards aware of the bad impact of child labour, it was felt that adults should also be educated. Many parents also wanted to be educated when they saw how children easily learnt to read and write. Therefore, RUGMARK also started Adult Education Centres for adult weavers near their work place and in the schools. At present, 175 adult weavers are studying in the Adult Education Centres.

RUGMARK Mobile Health Clinic to Steer across the Carpet Belt

The carpet looms are spread over very large rural areas. These are usually economically backward areas where health care facilities are scanty. They are also far away from the bigger cities, where health facilities are available. Insofar healthcare is a big problem for the people in these areas.

The RUGMARK Foundation, therefore, has been organizing regular health-check services through experienced doctors for children of the RUGMARK schools. To extend the benefit of this service to more people and to provide on-the-spot health facilities for the children of the carpet weavers and their families, the concept of a mobile clinic was mooted.



This idea finally took shape due to intense efforts carried out by the IGEP Director, who is also Permanent Advisor to the RUGMARK Foundation. With Rotary International, the Rotary Club of Delhi Midtown and of Seoul, South Korea have organised this facility. In December 2002, a Maruti Omni Ambulance was presented to the RUGMARK Foundation for running and managing it as a Mobile Health Clinic in the carpet belt of Uttar Pradesh.

This mobile van is equipped with all the basic medical facilities. It is now operational in the rural areas of the carpet belt. It will primarily attend to the health problems of the children and the families of the carpet weavers' community apart from the students studying in RUGMARK schools.

Many a times, the weavers ignore their health problems due to lack of time or because the village dispensary/health centre is located far away from their village. For them, the medical services of the Mobile Health Clinic will prove to be a big boon and will provide them with timely medical attention.

Small RUGMARK Label for Chenille, Jute or Coir Rugs

While the carpet market in Europe and USA is characterised by stagnation and saturation, the business in the smaller size, decorative rugs is gaining significance. The RUGMARK Foundation therefore contacted various manufacturers and buyers and mooted the idea of RUGMARK certification with a special label for this product category.

This move was well in line with the changing consumer preferences for rugs, carpets etc. in the traditional export markets. It took into consideration the trend that highly fashion-conscious consumers of the west constantly seek new things, not only in clothing but also in their homes. Since hand-knotted carpets are comparatively highly priced, people more and more seek affordable and fashionable products, which can be easily disposed off after a relatively short period.

Therefore, it was envisaged that RUGMARK has to expand its ambit from carpets to other product of this category. As a result the small RUGMARK label was born. It looks exactly the same as the European label, only smaller!

RUGMARK Labelled Carpets- now for the Domestic Market too!

Till recently, RUGMARK labelled carpets were only available to consumers in the importing countries like USA, UK, Germany and Italy etc. However it no longer seemed pertinent to further ignore the burgeoning domestic market. The Indian domestic consumer is now more demanding and responsive regarding the social responsibilities of business. Such it is expected that there is a good market also for RUGMARK labelled carpets which are certified as clean free of illegal child labour.

One of the first RUGMARK licensees - Maharaja Arts Ltd. volunteered for this initiative. They have a showroom in a nice locality in New Delhi, which is thronged by the foreign tourists as well as Indian consumers. This location was found suitable for establishing a RUGMARK Corner. It will serve the Indian consumers as well as it will spread the message of RUGMARK far and wide with foreign tourists.

There was another synergy that was envisaged with this project. This RUGMARK outlet will also sell carpets manufactured by students of RUGMARK Balashrya and schools in their vocational training classes. Also carpets made by the women trainees of Carpet Weaving Centre will feature in the showroom of Maharaja Arts Ltd. Last but not the least,

the coveted pieces of master craftsmanship from RUGMARK licensees will be in the showroom as well. The income from this outlet will be used to support various activities of the RUGMARK Foundation India.

Carpet Weaving Training Centre for Women

Carpet weaving is a 'household' work in the famous carpet-weaving belt of Varanasi-Bhadohi-Gopiganj. However ironically, the house-women from this area till now had little participation in it. The carpet weaver families are mostly poor and the women of these families are mainly confined to home only.

Therefore, it was always felt that if the women also get an opportunity to work in the family business and support the family income, it could provide a great financial relief to the family. To support this cause, RUGMARK opened a Carpet Weaving Training Centre for Women, in Gopiganj, Bhadohi towards the end of 2002. This Centre is now providing training in carpet weaving to girls and women, who are more than 14 years of age.

This Training Centre provides them training in carpet weaving and gives them skills, which they can use to support their living. Special arrangements are being made by RUGMARK to market and sell these carpets.

The women get a stipend during their training to support their living. The Training Centre also gives them a chance to get away even though for a short while from the routine of their daily life. By looking at the trainees, one can clearly make out that they are enjoying acquiring new skills and finding good camaraderie in a different, supportive and friendly environment.

RUGMARK Website

A completely re-structured website of RUGMARK India has been uploaded on the Internet (www.rugmarkindia.org). The company profiles of RUGMARK licensees have been included in it. It is hoped that it will not only provide information about RUGMARK and its activities, but it will also serve the purpose to disseminate information about its licensees.

Conclusion

Now almost with first nine years behind it, the RUGMARK Foundation India can look back with a sense of achievement and steady growth. With the future beckoning, it has reset its compass for further achievements. The primary objectives remain to reduce illegal child labour, to provide opportunities to the deprived children and to make efforts for the growth of the carpet industry. This, of course, as in the past, can only be achieved with the support of carpet manufacturers and exporters, and of importers abroad, who have supported the RUGMARK scheme so efficiently.

In the last few years, the growth rate for the exports of carpets has slowed down. Particularly, the demand for hand-knotted carpets had suffered badly. Hand-knotted carpets are an investment for the consumers, which can be rolled up and taken with no matter how many times one moves in one's lifetime. It is hoped that the markets of the importing countries would recover soon and then the demand for hand-knotted carpets will get a fresh push.

The success gained so far has only been possible with the permanent support and co-operation of our valued licensees (carpet importers and exporters). We know how difficult their situation sometimes is. The more we want to thank them.